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10 July 1970

MEMORANDUM FOR: Chief, Support Services Staff
THROUGH : Deputy Chief, Support Services Staff
SUBJECT : Records Information System

1. I believe there are three reasons for continuing and extending the punched card application [REDACTED] originally developed for DD/ST. It will provide for the first time an Agency-wide data base containing detailed information about on hand records, and files which can be used to: (1) provide input to a Records System analysis and design effort; (2) test the notion that effective management and control can be exercised through a centralized data base; and (3) provide a basis for developing records creation and storage policies.

STATINT

2. Systems Analysis and Design

There has to be a distinction made between a "Records System" and a "Records information system". The former is concerned with the creation of records, on hand storage and use and disposition. The latter is concerned with building and maintaining a data base which describes the material flowing through the records system.

The Agency has a Records system. It has problems. We don't really know enough about the system to solve its problems. Hence the need for the Records Information System. The punched card application is available and it seems to address the right items. If unnecessary data is being collected or necessary data is being missed then modifications should be made. The Records Administration people will have to make those determinations. In any event it seems an easy way to develop the data base required for the information system.

Management and Control

Inability to manage a decentralized program from a centralized location has been a long-term aggravation to those responsible for records management. Alternative organizational solutions have not been accepted, so some alternative to an organizational solution is needed. The development of a detailed data base with broad coverage should have the potential for providing a non-organizational alternative.

The Agency Records officer would be the user of the Agency data base. His use of the data base will depend on his immediate purpose but he should be able to review status, project and analyze trends, identify problems and their source(s) and offer advice and guidance from a position of strength. His position of strength derives from possessing detailed facts. His advice and guidance should be less academic and abstract because he knows more about the problem at hand.

Records creation and storage policy

The capability for developing policy follows logically from the capability for establishing management and control. The possession of an information base can be used to develop policy in the same way it is used to develop a management and control mechanism.

3. Some hesitancy has been expressed about adopting the punched card application. The accuracy of the data, the coding structures being used and the necessity for using punched cards (or any other form of automation) are three of the expressed reservations.

Data accuracy should be very suspect and data validation should be the first use of the data base. Comparisons between the Office inventories, the Office records schedules, and related records center data should develop some clues indicating where the inaccuracies are. On the spot investigation and follow-up should indicate why the inaccuracies occurred and what should be done to eliminate them.

Coding structures are a more difficult problem. Codes can be added or the coding structure can be collapsed rather easily. Problems begin to occur if the coded items in the file have to be split between 2 or more new coding categories. The coding being used has been reviewed and it should be reviewed again. This

second review should concentrate on making certain that the existing codes are homogeneous now and have a reasonable likelihood of remaining so. New codes can be added or existing codes combined with no problem so long as the homogeneity of the existing codes is retained.

The necessity for using automation can be justified from two points of view. First, it lends a little glamour to the exercise. The inventory form (Form 138) might well be redesigned to reflect its status as an input document. Using punched cards should result in a manpower savings by reducing the requirements for tabulating and reporting inventory items. Careful watch should be kept of manpower savings, if they don't accrue the punched cards should be abandoned and manual methods employed. This application should not be programmed for a computer system.